Shipbuilding remained in the hands of the Ministry of Shipping until May, 1917. During these five months.

Shipbuilding

Sir Joseph Maclay greatly speeded up the completion of vessels already under construction, and devised a programme that would eventually yield upwards of 3,000,000 tons of merchant shipping a year. There was serious need for some such stimulus, for despite the inroads made by the submarines, our construction of merchant shipping had been falling off heavily since the outbreak of the War. In 1913 there had been completed 1,9195578 tons gross of merchant shipping. In 1915 the total was 688,629 tons, and in 1916 it fell still lower to 538,797 tons. Part of this decline had been due to the much greater output of war vessels and auxiliary craft for the Admiralty, but even after making allowance for this, the total gross tonnage of all kinds completed during these years had shown, too, a heavy falling off from the 1913 figure. During the first five months of 1917, from January to May, the merchant tonnage completed was 376,588 tons. The programme put in hand resulted in the completed tonnage for the whole of 1917 reaching the figure of 1,163,474 gross tons. This result was achieved in spite of the largely increased demands on our iron and steel supplies, as well as on our engineering resources, by the swelling needs of the Army and Navy.

Arrangements were also set on foot for extensive

purchases of foreign shipping.

In addition to his efforts to increase our tonnage, the Shipping Controller set to work to organise the more effectual and economic use of the shipping we had. In January, 1917, out of a total of 3,731 passenger and cargo vessels of 1,600 gross tonnage